



# Alabama Geologist

*A Publication of the Alabama Board of Licensure for Professional Geologists*

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## Professional Ethics and Principles of Practice

A major cornerstone of the licensure process is the application of professional ethics and the principles of practice. Each licensee of the Alabama Board is an ad hoc member of the Board's Ethics Committee. It is the responsibility of each licensee to help monitor irresponsible and fraudulent geologic practice within the State of Alabama by individuals as well as corporations and companies that provide geological services to the public. Each licensee is encouraged to report irresponsible and fraudulent geologic practices to the Board. Initial reports may be given by mail, telephone, fax or e-mail. However, all allegations or reports must be submitted in writing following the procedures set forth in the Administrative Rules of the Board prior to any formal action by the Board.

For the past two years, the American Institute of Professional Geologists has published in "The Professional Geologist" a series of

articles about professional ethics and principles of practice. From time to time, this column will summarize comments expressed in that publication for the general interest of licensed geologists. One of the current topics of review is professional and personal ethics - are the two separable or does one build on the other? Outlined below are abstracts from two different points of view as to how to apply a professional code of ethics.

A statement by Kurt A. Bogner, CPG-9489, in "The Professional Geologist", December, 1995, summarized the ethics issue - "A person's ethics reflect who the person is and not just how they behave... If a person violates the law in his or her own personal conduct, what does that say about adhering to a professional code of ethics? If a person will cheat on his personal income taxes, how readily do you think he will overcharge a client for services? There can be no distinction between a person's personal and professional code of ethics. One person can not have two codes of ethics — to do so violates the entire concept of integrity."

An alternate, somewhat less stringent, position was taken by Fred L. Fox, CPG-1273, in "The Professional Geologist", January, 1996, "A... code of ethics (AIPG) is a professional code of ethics... anything greater would be beyond our (AIPG) scope, therefore, the code can only apply to professional related behavior. The code of ethics is a set of standards for professional

behavior. Ethics is not behavior. Legal right is not the same as ethical right. Ethics is higher. A truly unethical person, or one who behaves in an 'unethical' manner, will tend to be unethical across the board in all aspect of his/her life or work. A jailed or corrected licensee should not expect to continue the practice of geology. In conclusion, (the Board) must refrain from judgment on any professional practice issues."

What are your thoughts? Please drop us a note, 250 words or less, by regular mail, fax or e-mail. We will collate your responses and publish them in a later issue of the "Alabama Geologist".

The Public Practice of Geology in the State of Alabama was broadly defined in our first issue of the "Alabama Geologist". Geologists share a professional relationship with both engineers and other professionals involved in various types of environmental and other work to see that the best effort is attempted by all. Nothing less than honest competent work should be accepted or tolerated. Over the next several years, the role of all professionals involved in any public activity related to the public health, safety or welfare will be monitored closely by those outside our profession to see how we react and respond. Let's do it, and do it in a professional manner.

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## Letters to the Editor

This column will be provided in future issues of the "Alabama Geologist" for licensees to express their views and concerns about various geologic practices, misconduct or any other concern that he or she feels should be brought to the attention of other licensees. Please be advised, however, that no potentially libelous material will be accepted. All issues, good or bad, should be presented in a positive, constructive manner. If you wish to share your view with others, please mail, fax or e-mail your comments to the Board's office. All comments must be signed and dated, with the address, telephone number and license number of the submitter.

## ASBOG Membership

The Alabama Board of Licensure for Professional Geologists is now a Full Member of the National Association of State Boards of Geology (ASBOG). Participation in this organization is vital to establishing and maintaining links with other states who have registration or licensure. The Board participated in the ASBOG meeting in Wisconsin, October 22-27, 1997, as a full member for the first time. There were many issues pertaining to the geology profession discussed at this meeting and hopefully, with the variety of participating member states, we can work closely to help bring the licensure process more uniformity.

## ASBOG Exam

The first ASBOG examination was administered by the Board on September 19, 1997, and was very successful. We had nine participants, which was more than anticipated for the first exam.

The next examination is scheduled for April 17, 1998. All persons interested in taking the April

examinations should contact the Board office before March 1, 1998.

## Mississippi Registration

Mississippi has enacted an act to register all geologists who publicly practice geology in that state. Our first information indicates that the initial "grandfather" period will run through December 1998. For information, contact Dr. Darrel Schmitz at (610) 325-2904 or E-mail [schmitz@geosci.msstate.edu](mailto:schmitz@geosci.msstate.edu).

## Executive Secretary Notes

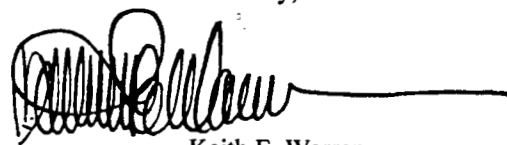
We are beginning to slow down here in the office. I would like to thank you for your patience during the last several months. We have recently moved the office from Suite 254 to Suite 150 and we are now beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

I would like to apologize for the length of time it has taken to satisfy the orders for your seals and stamps. For everyone who has submitted a request and fees, but has not received a seal and stamp, you will receive them the first week of January. If you have not submitted your request, please do so at your earliest convenience.

We have a new e-mail address, [ALGEOBD@aol.com](mailto:ALGEOBD@aol.com). Hopefully, we can better serve you with easier access through this new e-mail.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or any member of your staff if we can ever be of any assistance to you. We are always interested in your comments and look forward to continue working with you in the future.

Sincerely,



Keith E. Warren  
Executive Secretary

## ABLPG Policy #2

### USE OF ABLPG SEAL

Use of the seal or stamp of the Alabama Board of Licensure for Professional Geologists for any purpose without the expressed written permission of the Board is illegal. A corporation or company shall not use the ABLPG seal, stamp or logo in any manner, form or fashion to advertise the licensure of its employees by the State of Alabama or imply licensure or sanction by the Board.

Licensed Professional Geologists of the State of Alabama may use the Board seal on their individual personal stationary or business cards, but must indicate their license number in a prominent manner in conjunction therewith. The form of the Board seal to be authorized for use other than by the Board shall not exceed 3/4 the size of the Board seal.

## ABLPG Policy #3

### GUIDELINES FOR USE OF PROFESSIONAL SEALS AND STAMPS

The Alabama Board of Licensure for Professional Geologists recognizes that the purpose of the professional seal or stamp is to authenticate geological documents prepared by or under the supervision of the person whose seal is used. Electronic or photostatic reproduction and use of stamp or seal in lieu of the actual stamp or seal is neither authorized, recognized or endorsed for official purposes. Geological documents include any document or illustration, paper, electronic, or photostatically reproduced, resulting from professional services or supervision of professional services, where such service requires the application of geological principles or data. Electronic submittal of any document or illustration for any purpose or need is strongly discouraged since

neither the stamp, seal nor signature can be authenticated. The seal or stamp of an Alabama Professional Geologist should be applied only to those documents for which the person whose seal is imprinted takes full professional responsibility. If more than one person accepts responsibility for work included in a document, the document should bear the signature and seal of each person and a notation indicating which parts of the document each person accepts responsibility. A geological report, document or illustration can not be submitted in the name of a corporation, company, or partnership without the signature and seal of the licensed geologist accepting responsibility for the work described.

The Board recommends legal proscriptions against the making of changes to a document sealed by a professional geologist. If changes are required, either a new document incorporating the changes shall be prepared and the old document destroyed, or an addendum noting the changes shall be made. Each document, original, new, or an addendum, is the professional responsibility of the document's author or authors. Where any geological document is to be used for legal purposes, the responsible geologist should initial every page to insure originality of reported results or findings and stamp every illustration. Documents for legal use should be signed in a blue ink to reduced unauthorized reproduction. The imprint of the stamp or seal should in all instances cover part of the legal signature of the licensee and date of signature of the responsible Alabama Licensed Professional Geologist.

## Selling Your Seal

In a recent letter that was forwarded to the ABLPG, a local environmental attorney indicated that a firm in Alabama had been contacted by several licensed geologists with offers to sign

off on underground storage tank closures. It was not clear whether these geologists were proposing to subcontract to do the work or just sign off for the companies closures, but it resulted in significant discussion during the November 19, 1997 Board meeting.

There are several places in the Rules and Regulations which address the use of your signature and seal. 364-X-14.06 Ethics states: "A professional geologist shall contribute to the maintenance, integrity, independence and competency of the geologic profession as follows: (1) The professional geologist shall not: (f) permit or allow himself/herself, his professional identification, seal firm, or business name, or his business name, or his/her services to be used or made use of, directly, or in any manner whatsoever, so as to make possible or create the opportunity for unauthorized practice of Geology by any person, firm, or corporation in Alabama; (1) place his/her seal and/or signature and license number on a document constituting a certification that the document was prepared by the licensee, unless that document was prepared by a licensed geologist or under his/her direct supervision or unless the license has reviewed the document in sufficient depth to fully coordinate and assume responsibility for the work or report prepared or done by another licensed geologist;

Also, Chapter 364-X-15.01(2), Compliance and Enforcement, states: "Every company, partnership, corporation, firm or professional association which performs geological services in the State of Alabama, shall have a resident licensed professional geologist in responsible charge in each separate office in which geological services are performed. The resident licensed professional geologist shall be an employee of the company, partnership, corporation, firm or professional association or other entity, engaged in the practice of geology. Such geologist can be the resident

licensee at only one place of business at one time."

These rules were written to ensure that the geologist who performs or directly supervises the project takes responsibility for that work. The bottom line is that the act of simply reviewing a report and signing off as the principal project geologist is an illegal act and could result in the loss of your license. We should keep ethics in mind when conducting the practice of geology.

## Continuing Education

Several questions have been received by the Board relative to the continuing education requirement for registration renewal. Most of these questions are answered in Chapter 364-X-13 of the "Administrative Rules, Ethics and Enabling Act" sent to you with your original application. One of the most frequently asked questions is

whether a certain activity is acceptable by the Board or not. In general, common sense should prevail, but there are a few key points that would indicate an activity's acceptability.

- A. Was a registration fee required?
- B. Was there a formal published program?
- C. Was there an edited guidebook?

A "yes" to questions like these would strongly suggest that the requirements outlined in the Administrative Rules would be met by the activity. Subscribing to and reading professional journals is encouraged but does not count. Attendance at informal in-house seminars or attending talks of guest speakers would not generally be accepted, but may be approved on a case-by-case basis. Participation in society sponsored field trips is encouraged, but can be used to fulfill no more than half of the required hours.

Finally, do not send documentation of continuing education activities to the

Board office unless asked to do so. You will be mailed a reporting form with your renewal application. This form will be filled out indicating what your claimed activities are. The Administrative Rules require you to keep and submit records so that your activities can be verified if needed. The process is designed to be simple and we anticipate reasonable flexibility during the first few years. If you have read the Administrative Rules and still have questions, please call Dr. Bob Cook at (334) 844-4891.

Any organization proposing to offer continuing education credits in support of the license requirements for the Alabama Board of Licensure for Professional Geologists must have pre-approval from the Board.

*Professional Ethics  
Continuing Education  
ABLPG Policies*

*Inside this Issue...*

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**Alabama Geologist**

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